



## Long Term Yields

Psalm 119; Isaiah 55:10-13; Mat 13:1-9, 18-23; Rom 8:1-11

We have all heard the rhyme, no doubt: *What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and everything nice, that's what little girls are made of. What are little boys made of? Snips and snails and puppy dog tails, that's what little boys are made of.* Allow me to propose a different line of sorts: *What is society made of? Credit and purchase and debt and consumption, instant gratification is the stuff we are made of.* It is the root problem of our national economic woes. While the Bible would encourage us to take a long term view of life, we want to live in the moment and for the moment. Can we experience worthwhile results from living for anything less than the long term yields of God's guidance?

The psalmist calls us to establish our lives on a better framework than one for which we would settle. He calls us to find God's instruction and guidance as the parameter for true living. He sets forth God's instruction as a guide he is determined to follow. It is a means of security in the face of danger and opposition from enemies. He is not so concerned with the immediacy, but the long term results of God's protection, direction, and blessing. Problems still exist in his path, but he lives for something more than the temporary distractions they provide.

Isaiah speaks of the assurance of God's provision. His words begin with the picture of a crop's dependence upon rain. He does not stop there. That is still a picture of a medium term yield of dependence on God's provision. He speaks rather of a return from exile. Generations down the road, God's hand of provision would be seen and understood as preparing for a new day under *Yahweh's* new quality of joy and blessing.

It was not the picture the people were so interested in hearing. It spoke of hope, yet hope that would be a long time in coming to full realization. They wanted the short term response of God's blessing. They wanted to live in the moment for the moment. They did not want to wait until tomorrow to find the fulfillment of *Yahweh's* blessing. They wanted God's blessing without God's direction. They wanted rather to control the moment and ignore God's will. They did not want God to get in the way of the plans, dreams, and ambitions they had in life. As little children, they wanted immediate satisfaction. They did not have the maturity to look for the long term yields of living according to God's parameters.

Paul writes to the Romans, speaking of a higher way of living. He speaks of the freedom in Christ to live not according to the dictates of a static law, but according to the example of Christ Jesus. In reality, there was already this freedom in the promise given to Abraham, but it had been distorted in traditional interpretation of God's way of life. Rather than a burden one must carry in heeding the letter of a legal tradition, Paul spoke of the freedom in following the instruction of grace in Christ.

As the psalmist, Paul found the blessing of following God's direction and instruction. He spoke of it as freedom in Christ—a freedom to truly live. No longer living by the dictates of immediate gratification in our sinful inclination, he called believers to live for the blessings of true freedom after the example of Christ Jesus.

Real life is about more than living for the moment. It is living the long term yields of God's blessing in the moment. It is understanding the greater quality of life according to the instruction of the Creator of life.

Jesus spoke of different reactions to God's way of life. There were those who simply ignored God's instruction, preferring to make their own way. Others liked to hear God's instruction, but chose not to live by it. Another group grasped God's instruction, began to live it, but allowed other concerns to take over, displacing the gospel of Christ. Still another group allowed the gospel to change their lives, producing in them a changed character and results that could be seen.

The first three groups were too concerned with other issues in life. Living for the moment, for personal gratification, for concerns of health, wealth, and security, they ignore God's instruction for life. They may yet give lip-service to following God, but it is only a superficial relationship with the gospel and will of God. Other things are just too important. The fleeting pleasures of life, economic gain, and the pleasures of one's leisure override service to God.

It is interesting to note, however, that Jesus was not speaking this parable to an ungodly crowd. He was surrounded by people who took their religion seriously. They were in regular attendance at the synagogues or temple. They ritually obeyed the prescriptions of public prayers, Sabbath services at home, the various festivals of Jewish religious life, and following the various other prescribed ways of observing God's commandments.

They were very religious folk. By our standards, they were religious freaks, nuts, extremists, who wore their religion on their sleeves. It did them little good, however, for Jesus was not satisfied with the fruit of their religious observance. They were rituals, traditions, and practices associated with God, but falling short of true and faithful service. It bore fruit in bringing others to their traditions, but not to bringing others before faith in God.

Tradition is a question of self and security, not of God. Habit is a question of self and security, not of God. Custom is a question of self and security, not of God. Routine is a question of self and security, not of God. We are called beyond these patterns that grant us a sense of security amid life's uncertainty. We are called to live for the purposes of God's Spirit, rather than the routines and patterns of selfish life and desire.

Jesus was interested in more than established patterns of behavior. He was interested in lives based on redeeming love and grace. He was concerned with bringing people to a deeper quality of service to God than religious traditions and prescribed rituals could accomplish. He called the crowds to life with a true commitment that would transform not only their own lives, but the lives of others as well. Life in God's will should bear fruit. It is like the fruit tree that should do so much more than grow branches, leaves, roots, or even flowers. It is designed to bear fruit, year after year. Its concern must be about so much more than itself. It must produce new fruit and trees for a future generation.

As the people of God, we are called to bear fruit. We are called to live and work for so much more than our own sense of security and gratification. We are to find new meaning in living to make a difference in lives all around us. From investing in the lives of family and friends, we are to invest in the lives of neighbors, strangers, and even those who hold us as enemies. To be church, the body of Christ, is to assume this calling to live for the long term yields of the gospel. Will we settle for the passing pleasures of immediate gratification, or live for the eternal rewards of faithful service to God? If we choose to live for the moment, that is all the yield we can hope to receive. When it is over, its over.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*